

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Argent Associates

New Jersey Manufacturing Extension Program

Argent Associates Expands Business Through Quality Systems Project

Client Profile:

Argent Associates is a certified minority business enterprise providing inventory control, materials management and logistics to the telecommunications and retail industries. In 2001, the company entered the engineering and installation arenas to offer complete, end-to-end business solutions to its clients. Today, Argent is a \$45 million company, employing a staff of 25 people at its Edison, Illinois, facility. Argent is also located in Florida, Georgia, Texas, and New York.

Situation:

Argent wanted to grow, primarily by increasing its manufacturing capabilities and obtaining ISO certification. The company was introduced to the New Jersey Manufacturing Extension Program (NJMEP), a NIST MEP network affiliate, through the Chamber of Commerce. NJMEP's first step was to undertake a Quick View Assessment to identify Argent's strengths and needs in comparison to other companies in the same industry grouping. One of the areas of opportunity identified by the Quick View Assessment was Quality Systems. NJMEP led Argent to the New Jersey Department of Labor Customized Training Grant Program, through which Argent obtained grant assistance to achieve ISO certification and set up quality processes to pursue new businesses in manufacturing.

Solution:

NJMEP Field Agent Lorna Runkle performed the Quick View and helped Argent to identify opportunities for growth and improvement. After assisting with the NJDOL grant application, she served as project manager for the ISO training, assisted with its implementation and closed out the NJDOL grant. Runkle also established networking opportunities with prospective clients and vendors, and guided Argent to state and federal resource contacts.

The third-party resource for this project was Prism E-Solutions, whose company website was used for both on-line training and as a reference library. Face-to-face training was also employed. Argent housed, managed and maintained its Quality Systems documents on its own website through the ASP system, a web-based quality systems platform. Participation in the Quality Systems project among Argent employees was company-wide. Argent President/CEO Beatriz Manetta and Chief Operating Officer Ray Moya spearheaded the effort, while Mike Genovese and Christina Waring compiled processes and trained to serve as internal auditors. All employees completed training in ISO 9001, helped to refine processes, prepared for site visits and assisted in developing plans for improvement. Argent Associates began working on its ISO processes in January 2003; the company was recommended for certification in March 2004. ISO certification was of vital importance to Argent, since many telecommunications companies require their suppliers to be certified. Achieving ISO 9001 certification also allows Argent to bid on state and federal contracts and partner with other companies to pursue larger contracts.

Argent plans to continue working with NJMEP on issues of interest to New Jersey manufacturing businesses. Currently, NJMEP is helping Argent to train its employees in PC spreadsheets and

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

presentations; interpersonal and social skills; business management services; and Lean Manufacturing. Argent also is working in conjunction with NJMEP toward achieving TL9000 certification, which will further expand its ability to do business with large telecommunications companies.

Results:

- * Standardized processes, resulting in greater efficiency and safety.
- * Created employee intranet, improving internal communications.
- * Established formalized customer feedback process.
- * Received ISO training and ISO 9001 certification.
- * Obtained new contracts valued at \$2 million to \$5 million.
- * Retained 25 jobs and added 2 new jobs.
- * Continued collaboration with NJMEP on issues of interest to New Jersey manufacturing businesses.

Testimonial:

"Our experience with NJMEP when we were working toward ISO 9001 certification was a positive one. When we decided to move to the next step and achieve TL9000 certification, we didn't think twice about calling NJMEP and asking for assistance. Our relationship with NJMEP has been good for business. It is through organizations like NJMEP that small-to-medium-sized companies are able to grow and be a part of the state's economic prosperity."

Beatriz M. Manetta, Founder/President/CEO